The moral psychology Locke and his successors brought to the world was a conscious psychology. “The Power of Thinking is called the Understanding,” Locke wrote. “And therefore whatever Past actions it [the Person] cannot reconcile or appropriate to that present self by consciousness, it can no more be concerned in, than if they had never been done.”¹ “Every person is conscious,” Joseph Butler agreed, “that he is now the same person or self he was as far back as his remembrance reaches...”; that which is not remembered does not exist.² Sense impressions might be received at random, and mental reflections might congregate in ways the philosopher could not see, but a selection made their way across what Locke called “the Horizon found, which sets the Bounds between the enlightened and dark Parts of Things”³ to the realm of conscious understanding as ideas.

Only a modest number of such phenomena was necessary to set intellectual life in motion:

Nor will it be thought so strange, to think these few simple Ideas sufficient to employ the quickest Thought, or largest Capacity; and to furnish the Materials of all that various Knowledge, and more various Fancies and Opinions of all Mankind, if we consider how many Words may be made out of the various composition of 24 Letters; or if going one step further, we will but reflect on the variety of combinations may be made, with barely one of the above-mentioned Ideas, viz. Number, whose stock is inexhaustible, and truly infinite....⁴

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³ Locke, Essay, 47.
⁴ Locke, Essay, 132.
But an attitude in which ideas are analogically reducible to a set of (presumably) pre-existent letters and numbers was an easy target for both Hume (for whom individuals “are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement”) and Berkeley (“Mind is a congeries of Perception. Take away perceptions & you take away the Mind put the Perceptions & you put the Mind”).\(^5\) Locke’s formula may look naïve, but Hume’s and Berkeley’s alternatives look sceptical. It is as difficult to establish a viable moral psychology in a perpetual flux and a congeries as it is in the alphabet.

The response to these formulations that we find in the work of Wordsworth and other Romantic realists like him is as much in conflict with Hume and Berkeley as it is with Locke: that all three philosophers are right, up to a point. The mind is a congeries of perception and it is a flux—but it is not a perpetual one. Sometimes it acts like an abacus or an alphabet, and sometimes it acts like smoke particles in air. There is plenty of significant moral territory between “the sameness of a rational being” and a “bundle of different perceptions.” Unnavigable depth, to use Wordsworth’s own expression, obscures a great deal in the mind, but there are islands there, too.\(^6\) “In his discovery that human experience was not evenly continuous and homogenous, and that amidst its normal flow there were incidents of a quite different quality in determining the growth of the mind,” Wordsworth, it has been suggested, “was perhaps helped by the fact that his own mode of experiencing things was specially sensitive to the isolated, in time or in space.”\(^7\) Whether Wordsworth’s emphases here are a consequence of his view of experience or a precondition of it, both the orderly process of sense impressions being organized into reflections by principles of intellectual association and the principle of flux were sharply cut across by his stress on the singular, the dramatic, and the revelatory. “Wordsworth’s poetry,” Noel Jackson suggests, “describes and models a form of

